

Rest From Labor

by Bryan Hodge

In 1844, President Grover Cleveland made Labor Day a Federal Holiday. “It constitutes a yearly national tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country” (History of Labor Day, dol.gov).

American workers are consistently listed as among the most productive in the world. In 2017, the United States ranked fourth in GDP per hour worked (\$72). This was behind Ireland (\$99.5), Norway (\$83.1), and Germany (\$72.2); but ahead of the rest of the world including – Canada (\$55.2), Japan (\$46.2), South Korea (\$37) and Mexico (\$21.6), according to Forbes (Where Labor Productivity is Highest by Niall McCarthy, February 05, 2019, Forbes.com).

The country music group Alabama paid tribute to the American worker in the song, “40 Hour Week (For A Livin’).” The song closes with these words, “Hello America, let me thank you for your time.”

Here are some thoughts on work.

1. Let us remember for whom we ultimately work.

Christians ultimately serve the Lord. Paul wrote, “And whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men... for you serve the Lord” (Colossians 3:23-24 cf. Ephesians 6:5-8). Let us honor Him in what we do.

2. Let us give our best.

Our service should be done “Heartily, as to the Lord and not to men” (Colossians 3:23). Our work ethic should be one of integrity and sincerity, and “not with eye-service, as men-pleasers” (Colossians 3:22 cf. Ephesians 6:6).

If we are going to do a work, let us give our best. Martin Luther King Jr. said this to a group of street sweepers in Memphis, Tennessee on March 18, 1968, “If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Shakespeare wrote poetry, like Beethoven composed music; sweep streets so well that all the host of Heaven and earth will have to pause and say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper, who swept his job well’” (William J. Bennett, *The Book of Man*, p. 92).

3. Let us give our best when doing spiritual work, or work in and for the church.

Let us be “fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). Roy Deaver commented, “‘Fervent in spirit’ is the very phrase used in Acts 18:25 to describe Apollos. Christians are to be earnest, sincere, devoted, dedicated, zealous in the Lord’s work. They are not to be cold; they are not to be indifferent” (Deaver, *Romans: God’s Plan For Man’s Righteousness*, p. 476).

Bible class teachers should give their best. Time should be spent in prayer, study, and meditation on the text. The teacher should be enthused about teaching. If the teacher is not enthused, likely the students will not be.

Preachers should give their best. Hours should be spent in prayer, study, and meditation about the lesson. I have known of preachers who get their sermons word for word off the internet. I am not talking about a sermon idea or outline. I am talking about word for word, even the “personal” references, and stories. I was told by a preacher about another preacher who calls him on Saturday night asking for a sermon manuscript to preach the next day. This disgusts me. Paul told Timothy, “give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:13), “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Timothy 4:15), “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5).

Song leaders should give their best. They really set the tone (pun intended!). They should know the song before leading it (note: I am not speaking of a singing in which new songs are tried). I heard a song leader apologize to a guest speaker saying, “I am sorry, the members did not know the song.” The guest preacher replied, “neither did you!” He had the words all wrong. The words of the song should be carefully considered. Thought should be given to the song selection.

Those who lead prayers and serve on the table should give their best. All should make effort to be holy (1 Timothy 2:8) and faithful (2 Timothy 2:2). Thought should be given to what is said. Vain repetition should be avoided (Matthew 6:7).

Those who publicly read scripture should give their best. The scripture should be read beforehand and pondered. Pronunciation should be considered. Punctuation should be observed. They should make effort to “read distinctly from the book” (Nehemiah 8:8).

Those in supporting roles (A\V, custodial, deacons) and all members should give their best. We should be one body working together for the glory of the Lord (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12).

4. The rest is to come.

Sometimes we do need a break. Jesus told the apostles, “Come aside by yourselves to a desert place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31 cf. Luke 5:15-16).

However, no Christian should retire from duty in this life. We are able to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58 cf. Galatians 6:9). We are to be “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). We are to be careful “to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8, 14). The rest is yet to come (Hebrews 4:9-10).

5. In the words of the song, “let me thank you for your time.”

[The congregation is appreciative to all who labor for the Lord at South Anchorage. Any good that this congregation is doing locally and beyond is being done together. Your work is important, and appreciated. Moreover, we are told, “God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10).]

Note: Bryan Hodge wrote this for Labor Day. ...Let’s cautiously and wisely get to work [navigating around the virus situation], and let’s give it our best. Church, we have work to do. Let’s give our best. “To the work! to the work! We are servants of God, Let us follow the path that our Master has trod; With the balm of His counsel our strength to renew, Let us do with our might what our hands to do. Toiling on, toiling on, Toiling on, toiling on, Let us hope and trust, Let us watch and pray, And labor till the Master comes”(Song: To The Work by Fanny Crosby).